

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

and

POETRY FOUNDATION

present



TEACHERS GUIDE

No student will be excluded from participation in this program on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, or national origin.

Additional copies of this publication can be downloaded at www.poetryoutloud.org.

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The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts — both new and established — bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.



The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audiences.

PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM): P 6 POETRY MAGAZINE, KATHLEEN RUTLEDGE, JOSEPH BREITENBACH, POETRY MAGAZINE, MARC NORBERG, ROBERT FRANK, JILL D'ALESSANDRO; P 10 TOD MARTENS, BARBARA SAVAGE CHERESH, DONNA LEE, MATTHEW CARLOS SCHWARTZ, POETRY MAGAZINE, DAVID BARTOLOMI, ALFRED MOSKOWITZ; P 12 GORDEN PARKES, HANK DE LEO, DAVID BURCKHALTER, GEORGE CSERNA, JOHN EDDY, ANGUS MCBEAN, JEFF ETHERIDGE; P 16 DON GETSUG STUDIOS, JOANN CARNEY, ERIC STEHLBERG, COURTESY OF THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY, POETRY MAGAZINE, POETRY MAGAZINE, POETRY MAGAZINE; P 18 HULLEAH TSINHNAHJINNIE, COURTESY OF THE ROSENBAUGH MUSEUM, POETRY MAGAZINE, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, JULIET VAN OTTEREN, COLLEEN MCKAY, JAMES H. MITCHELL, MD.

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LETTERS OF WELCOME



The memorization and recitation of poetry have been central elements of education since ancient times. Performance is also a major new trend in poetry. This recent resurgence of poetry as an oral art form can be seen in the slam poetry movement and in the immense popularity of rap music.

The National Endowment for the Arts and The Poetry Foundation have partnered with the State Arts Agencies on an exciting new program, *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*, which invites the dynamic aspects of slam poetry, spoken word, and theater into the English class. *Poetry Out Loud* helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

Learning great poetry by heart develops the mind and the imagination. By encouraging your students to study, memorize, and perform some of the most influential and timeless poems of the English language, you immerse them in powerful language and provocative ideas.

Although many students may initially be nervous about reciting in front of their teenage peers, the experience will prove valuable — not only in school, but also in life. Much of the future success of students will depend on how well they present themselves in public. Whether talking to one person or many, public speaking is a skill people use everyday in both the workplace and the community.

Poetry recitation as a competitive event is as old as the Olympic Games. Along with wrestling, long-distance running, and the javelin toss, the ancient Olympics included contests in music and poetry. Performers trained for years and traveled great distances to the Games. Please join us in restoring the energy and esprit of poetry recitation nationwide as *Poetry Out Loud*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dana Gioia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dana" and last name "Gioia" clearly distinguishable.

Dana Gioia
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts



Can there be any subject more difficult to teach in the classroom than poetry? Students who take their culture at the speed of the Internet may not easily find it in a measured, majestic poem that comes down to us from the past. But a great poem has much to tell if we can find a way to listen. It will speak to us and for us, giving voice to times of great joy or great loss. As we grow older it will grow with us, waiting to give new meaning to our deepening experience. "Why should I study this poem," the Internet-savvy student may ask, "let alone try to learn it by heart?" And we may answer, "Because it is a chance to make a friend for life."

The *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest* brings new energy to an ancient art by returning it to the classrooms of America. The public recitation of great poetry is a way to honor the speaker, the poem and the audience all at once. Hearing a poem spoken aloud, we discover that a poem is before anything else an event of the ear. In the hands of the poet our everyday speech becomes a musical instrument. The meaning of the poem, we find, lies as much in the sound of its words as in their sense.

Hearing the spoken words of the ancient poets we learn that we are not alone, that men and women always have felt as we feel, that the human spirit has been the unchanging constant in the history of our kind. Hearing the voices of our contemporary poets we learn again that we are not alone, that in our individuality we are a community. In this way the recitation of poetry brings history to life; in this way it creates community.

The Poetry Foundation is committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. Through its programs the Foundation seeks to make poetry directly relevant to the American public. We are excited to join with the National Endowment for the Arts in the *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "John Barr".

John Barr
President
The Poetry Foundation



GARY SOTO



TED KOOSER



ELIZABETH BISHOP

**Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.**

ROBERT FROST



LOUIS ERDRICH



ALLEN GINSBERG



J. B. WOCK KIM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

HISTORY OF PROGRAM

In spring 2005 several thousand students participated in successful pilot programs of *Poetry Out Loud* in Washington, DC and Chicago, Illinois. The program has now been expanded to state capitals across America. More than 250,000 students will take part in *Poetry Out Loud* this year.

CONTEST STRUCTURE

Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Beginning at the classroom level, winners from each class will advance to a school-wide competition. Each school will then send a finalist to the state-capital competition. In May 2006 one student from each state will compete in the National Finals in Washington, DC.

CLASSROOM TIME AND SCHEDULE

The curriculum for *Poetry Out Loud* has been intentionally designed to fit into a teacher's busy schedule without much disruption. The program takes place over the span of two to three weeks, according to each teacher's interest and schedule, and it will not require full class periods during that time. To accommodate schools' testing demands and vacation calendars, *Poetry Out Loud* can be implemented any time during January through March.

NCTE STANDARDS

Poetry Out Loud satisfies nearly all of the NCTE English Language Arts Standards (detailed information follows). In addition to memorizing and performing great poems, students will have the opportunity to discuss poems and—if the teacher wishes to use the optional lesson plans on the website—to write poetry of their own.

PRIZES

The following prizes are offered for the official contests identified and conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts and the government State Arts Agencies during the spring of 2006. The prizes do not apply to other contests.

State Prizes

Each winner at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington (with a chaperone) to compete for the national championship. The state winner's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for his or her school library.

National Prizes

A total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends will be awarded to the winners at the *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals.

ORGANIZING THE CONTEST EVENTS

LEAD TEACHERS

We recommend that each school identify one or two teachers to serve as the coordinators of *Poetry Out Loud*. Duties for Lead Teachers will include enlisting fellow teachers to participate, distributing the materials, organizing the school finals event, and keeping in touch with the State Coordinator. (Search “State Contacts” on the website, www.poetryoutloud.org, to identify your State Coordinator.)

We recommend that you organize your school event as soon as possible, in order to ensure greater attendance by the school community. The website includes tips on promoting the event within your school and community.

JUDGING THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL CONTESTS

The classroom teacher can serve as the sole judge for the classroom contests. At the school finals, three to five judges should be sufficient—a group of teachers may serve as judges, or you may invite some community members to judge the contest. Appropriate judges to invite could be local poets, actors, politicians, professors, arts reporters, or members of the school board.

We recommend that you print the Evaluation Scoresheets before the school contest, including the names of the participants and, if possible, the titles of the poems they will recite. This will save time for the judges during the contest and will allow them to focus their full attention on the performers.

PROMPTER

Even the most experienced actors can forget their lines. It is very helpful to have a teacher or student sit in front of the performers with copies of the poems to read along with the recitations, ready to prompt a student who may get stuck on a line. Show the performers where the Prompter is sitting before the contest begins, so they know where to look if they get lost during their recitations. If a performer is stuck for several seconds and looks to the Prompter for help, the Prompter may whisper the first words of the next line to get the performer back on track.

ACCURACY JUDGE

We advise you to assign a separate judge or a diligent student to serve as an Accuracy Judge. On a copy of the poem, the Accuracy Judge should mark missed or incorrect words made during the recitation. The teacher or lead judge can decide on the point scale for evaluating accuracy (i.e. minus one point for a couple of minor mistakes, minus two points for several mistakes or for missing lines, etc.). If the performer relies too heavily on the Prompter, points may be subtracted from the performer’s accuracy score. (As many as four points may be subtracted.)

CONTEST SCORING ADVICE

The judges usually need a few seconds between recitations to score the previous performance. Make sure the host waits for the judges’ acknowledgment before the next performer begins. It is also helpful to have a couple of people tallying scores during the contest, so the winners may be announced at the end of the event.

POEM SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE TIME

Students may select poems from the paper or online anthologies. All poems are at least eight but no more than 60 lines in length. The maximum time per poem should be about three or four minutes.

LENGTH OF CONTEST – LARGE AND SMALL SCHOOLS

A contest event should run for less than two hours; any longer than that can be difficult for the audience. Ideally, six to 15 students should compete in each school's final contest. If your school has six to 15 classes participating in the program, send one winner from each class to the school finals. If fewer than six classes are participating, two students from each class may advance to the school finals. If more than 15 classes are participating, you might consider holding grade-level competitions first, allowing two students from each grade to advance to the school finals.

NUMBER OF POEMS AT EACH CONTEST LEVEL

At the classroom contest, students must prepare one poem for recitation. Participants in the school finals must prepare two poems for recitation. For the students who advance to the state and national levels, three poems must be prepared for recitation.

It is strongly recommended that students who compete beyond the classroom level select poems of various style, time period, and voice. That diversity of selection will offer a richer and more complete performance.

MOVEMENT, MUSIC, AND COSTUMES

The recitation of poetry, in this context, is a bit different than theater acting. No music, costumes, or props may be used. However, gestures and some amount of movement may be appropriate and should be encouraged, depending on the poem.

INTRODUCING THE POEM

At the competition, students should stand before the audience, introduce themselves, and identify the poem they will perform. They should announce both the title and the author of the poem. (For example, "This is 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree,' by William Butler Yeats," or "I will be reciting 'The New Colossus,' by Emma Lazarus.") The poem must be recited from memory.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All evaluation criteria can be adjusted to accommodate students with disabilities. If an element of evaluation cannot apply to a contestant, you may remove it from the score sheet and average the applicable scores rather than add them. Additional guidance on implementing *Poetry Out Loud* for students with disabilities is available on the website, www.poetryoutloud.org.

We recommend that you provide a sign language interpreter at your school finals if you expect to have audience members who would benefit from that service. Signing students may perform with a voice interpreter, and you may enlist judges who know sign language.

ADDITIONAL SCHOOL PRIZES

Some schools have given their finalists extra prizes, ranging from gift certificates to anthologies. It may be appropriate to ask a local business (bookstore, café, record store, etc.) to donate those additional prizes. This is, of course, optional.



KEVIN YOUNG



MARY OLIVER



LI-YOUNG LEE



W.S. MERWIN



GWENDOLYN BROOKS



SHARON OLDS

**I like to think he knew that, even when,
proud (orgullosa) of his daughter's pen,
he stood outside mis versos, half in fear
of words he loved but wanted not to hear.**

RHINA P. ESPAILLAT



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Have students browse the poems.** We have provided classroom poetry anthologies and an extensive online anthology that includes several browsing options. Allow time for the students to browse the selection, either as homework or a classroom activity, and have the students select some poems they might memorize.
- 2 **Begin class with a poem a day.** Another way to expose students to poetry that they might not discover on their own is to read or recite a poem to them at the start of each class period. The website, www.poetryoutloud.org, includes poet biographies that may be read aloud, as well.
- 3 **Ask each student to select a poem to memorize.** At the classroom level, each student must choose one poem of eight or more lines to memorize and prepare for performance. Participants in the school-wide competitions will prepare two poems to recite. Students who advance to the citywide, statewide, or national levels will prepare three poems.
- 4 **Discuss the poems in class.** Understanding the text is the most important preparation for reading poetry aloud. If a performer doesn't understand the text, neither will the audience. Lead class discussions about the students' selected poems. (Dictionaries may be necessary for this activity.) Depending on class size, it might be wise to divide the students into groups of six to eight for discussions and text analyses.
- 5 **Have students memorize the poems.** Share these memorization tips with your students: 1. Rewrite your poem by hand several times. Each time, try to write more and more of it from memory. 2. Read your poem aloud before going to sleep at night, and repeat it when you wake up. 3. Carry around a copy of your poem in your pocket or bag. You'll find several moments throughout the day to reread or recite it. 4. Practice your poem by saying it to family and friends.
- 6 **Model recitation skills in the classroom.** The teacher should model both effective and ineffective recitation practices, asking students to point out which elements of the performance are successful and which are not. On the board, develop a list of bad habits that distract the audience or take away from the performance, such as inaudible volume, speaking too quickly, monotone voice, fidgeting, and mispronunciations. Then develop a list of elements that a successful recitation performance should contain, such as sufficient volume, an appropriate speed with the proper pauses, voice inflection, evidence of understanding, pronunciation, and eye contact with the audience. The teacher may also play portions of the audio CD for the students, as further examples of recitation practices.
- 7 **Practice the poems.** Allow class time for students to practice their poems. Break the class into pairs of students (rotating each session), and have each student practice with a partner. Partners should offer constructive criticism, using the Evaluation Sheet and Criteria as a guide.
- 8 **Include creative writing exercises.** Creative writing is a natural complement to *Poetry Out Loud*. For that reason, we have developed a number of optional writing exercises and lesson plans for teachers. You can find them on the website, www.poetryoutloud.org.



**What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry out like a raisin in the sun?**

LANGSTON HUGHES



ALICE FULTON



SIMON ORTIZ



W.H. AUDEN



CATHY NONG



T.S. ELIOT



NATASHA TRETHEWAY

SUGGESTED CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

- 1 Have students browse the anthologies and choose poems to memorize. **(1 full class)**
- 2 Read and discuss the poems in class. **(2-3 full classes)**
- 3 Model effective and ineffective recitation practices for the students. **(1 full class)**
- 4 Have students practice their poems with partners. **(15 minutes per day)**

WEEK TWO

- 1 Have students practice their poems with different partners each day. They should also work on their memorization and performance outside of school. Students should have their poems completely memorized and be able to recite without using a page by the end of the week. **(15 minutes per day)**
- 2 Implement the writing exercises and lesson plans. While reserving a portion of each class period for recitation practice, you might offer a more complete poetry unit that includes creative writing elements, using the provided lessons. **(1-5 full classes, optional)**
- 3 Hold the classroom recitation contests at the end of the week. **(1-2 full classes)**

WEEK THREE

- 1 Winners of the classroom contests will prepare two poems for recitation, and will compete in the school-wide competition at the end of this week. **(1 hour)**

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All evaluation criteria can be adjusted to accommodate students with disabilities. If an element of evaluation cannot apply to a contestant, you may remove it from the score sheet and average the applicable scores rather than add them. Additional guidance on implementing *Poetry Out Loud* for students with disabilities is available on the website, www.poetryoutloud.org.

VOLUME

Project to the audience. You want to capture the attention of everyone, including the people in the back row.

SPEED

Perform at a natural pace. People may speak or express themselves too quickly when they are nervous, which can make a performance difficult to understand. Speak slowly, but not so slowly that the language sounds unnatural or awkward.

VOICE INFLECTION

Avoid monotone recitation. If you sound bored, you will project that boredom onto the audience. However, too much enthusiasm can make your performance seem insincere.

POSTURE AND PRESENCE

Use good posture and be attentive.
Look confident.

EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

Be sure you know the meaning and correct pronunciation of every word and line in your poem. If you are unsure about something, it will be apparent to the audience. Don't hesitate to ask your teacher for help.

PRONUNCIATION

Make sure you know how to pronounce or sign every word in your poem. Articulate.

GESTURES

Depending on the poem, gestures and some amount of movement may be appropriate and should be encouraged, as long as they are not overdone.

EYE CONTACT

Engage your audience. Look them in the eye. If you have trouble with that, focus past them to the far wall, but try not to keep your head down.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

The difficulty of the poem you perform will be gauged, taking into account length, diction, and density of language. It is strongly recommended that students who compete beyond the classroom level select poems of various style, time period, and voice. That diversity of selection will offer a richer and more complete performance.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Contest judges will evaluate the overall success of your performance.

ACCURACY

A separate judge will mark missed or incorrect words made during the recitation. If you rely on the Prompter too much, points may be subtracted from your accuracy score. (As many as four points may be subtracted.)

A note to students on interpretation: Listen to the track on the audio CD in which poet David Mason introduces Yeats' "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." In his comments, he advises you to think about how you should interpret the tone and volume and voice of your poem. Is it a quiet poem? Is it a boisterous poem? Should it be read more quickly or slowly, with a happy or mournful tone? Your interpretation will be different for each poem, and it is a crucial element of your performance.

CONTEST EVALUATION SHEET

NAME OF PERFORMER

TITLE OF POEM

	WEAK	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Volume	1	2	3	4
Speed	1	2	3	4
Voice Inflection	1	2	3	4
Posture and Presence	1	2	3	4
Evidence of Understanding	1	2	3	4
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4
Gestures	1	2	3	4
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4
Level of Difficulty	1	2	3	4
Overall Performance	1	2	3	4

TOTAL

ACCURACY (SUBTRACT UP TO 4 POINTS)

FINAL SCORE

[PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE AS NECESSARY]



YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA



SEAMUS HEANEY



SYLVIA PLATH

**What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning.**

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY



CARL SANDBURG



SARA TEASDALE



WALLACE STEVENS

NCTE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Poetry Out Loud fulfills the following NCTE Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Teachers who make use of the optional writing activities and lesson plans found at www.poetryoutloud.org will also satisfy Standard #5.

- 1 Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- 2 Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 4 Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- 5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- 6 Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8 Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 9 Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- 10 Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
- 11 Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- 12 Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.

JOY HARJO



MAR ANNE MOORE



HARRIET MONROE



WALT WHITMAN



WILL COLLINS



ADRIENNE RICH



DYLAN THOMAS



A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART.



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